CHAPTER 8
CIVIC ACTION

Building a Sports Field in Occupied Germany

In an educational program designed to give American personnel a working knowledge of German, to promote social contacts between Americans and Germans and to encourage German-American sports contests, Army-German advisory councils were set up in each Army military post, where problems affecting German-American relationships could be discussed openly and possibly solved on the spot.

In the village of Wilhelmsfeld at a town meeting, held in 1951, the citizens of the community discussed the need for a sports field and playground for the children and youth of the town. The land, a clearing in a forest near the village, was available, but the 22,000 marks needed for leveling the land and clearing it of tree stumps was far beyond the villagers' means. Officials of the village and members of the sports club presented their problem at a town meeting, requesting Army Engineer assistance.

In response to the townspeople's plea, personnel of the Engineer Field Service Center and the 77th Engineer Construction Battalion moved bulldozers and other heavy equipment into the forest clearing. The big earthmoving machines, tearing up tree stumps and pushing piles of earth, provided daily entertainment for the local people, who were accustomed to doing their earthmoving with picks, shovels, and wheel-borrows.

The completion of the sports field occasioned "great festivity." The local school children and the town choral society participated in the celebration, and various honors were bestowed on the engineers to the accompaniment of loud applause by the villagers.

Karl C. Dod

Source: E. P. Hanifan, "The Army Lends a Helping Hand," *The Military Engineer,* (July - August 1951), 279.

Aid for Earthquake Victims in Morocco

Shortly before midnight on 29 February 1960, the resort city of Agadir, Morocco, was wrecked by a 12-second earth tremor. Of the city's 45,000 inhabitants, 12,000 were either dead or missing, 5,000 were injured, and almost all survivors were homeless. When Moroccan officials appealed on 1 March to all nations capable of giving aid, the U.S. Ambassador at Rabat requested military assistance from American forces in Europe.

Engineers were among those sent. Shortly after noon on 2 March, the first plane load of equipment and personnel of Company A, 79th Engineer Battalion, stationed in Germany, was airborne. When the men went to work in Agadir on the morning of 3 March, they used no heavy equipment for fear of killing persons trapped in the rubble. Four pick-and-shovel teams dug out 28 survivors on the first day. French, Spanish, and Moroccan military teams dug in other sections of the city. The engineer water supply point produced about 1,000 gallons of potable water per hour for quake victims and U. S. personnel. In addition, the U.S. Navy Cruiser *Newport News* docked at Agadir prepared to furnish 25,000 gallons of water per day for refugee camps.

Late on 3 March, the Moroccan government decided to end the pick and shovel rescue operations and use heavy equipment. The basic plan was to raze the city completely and eventually rebuild it. The 79th Engineers were assigned the task of knocking down what remained of the city, leveling the rubble, and spreading disinfectants over the ruins.

Karl C. Dod

Source: D.J. Hickman, U.S. Army in Europe 1953 - 1963, (MS in Center of Military History).

Bridge Building in Tunisia

Engineer units stationed in various parts of the world have on numerous occasions undertaken what are known as civic actions; that is, they have participated in projects that benefited local populations and often have provided help when disaster struck.

In 1964, Company B of the 293d Engineer Battalion in Germany undertook a civic action in Tunisia. A flood in October of that year destroyed an important railroad bridge over which shipments of ore were made, shipments vitally important to the Tunisian economy. Seeking fast action, the Tunisian government turned to the United

States for help. An engineer from the 7th Engineer Brigade in Germany flew down on 12 November to inspect the site. Later that month the first American plane arrived bringing men of Company B and bridge parts. The engineers finished their work on 7 December, the same day the Tunisian railway engineers completed laying the rails. Two days later all work was finished. The bridge had been restored in less than a month after reconstruction began. The United States presented the bridge to Tunisia as a gift.

Karl C. Dod

Source: Edward B. Glick, *Peaceful Conflict*, 143 - 44.

Suspension Bridges in Afghanistan

Even in such a far away and, to Americans, little known country as Afghanistan, the Engineers have participated in projects for the benefit of the local inhabitants.

Footbridges across the swiftly flowing streams of densely populated eastern Afghanistan usually consisted of pieces of hand-made rope and sticks of wood. All too often the bridges collapsed, carrying people to their deaths. The governor of one of the eastern provinces asked the U. S. Agency for International Development (AID) to assist in putting in better bridges. Members of the local Engineer area office, who in the 1960's were supervising construction of a modern highway system in the country, set to work to design a standard footbridge that could be built almost entirely by local workmen using local materials.

The Engineers designed two variations of a suspension bridge using towers of local timbers resting on masonry abutments. The first was designed to sustain the weight of a loaded donkey every 10 feet. The second, only slightly different, was designed to carry pedestrians, animals, and small vehicles. The steel hangers that carried the wooden deck of both types of bridges would be hung from the two main cables stretching from shore to shore.

A Peace Corps volunteer supervised construction. A number of competent local masons and carpenters were available. Ample supplies of rock for the abutments were found along the river banks. The two main cables were first strung from shore to shore and construction on the bridge then proceeded from the near shore to the far shore. Members of the Engineer area office periodically checked the work. The first bridge cost less than $1,000 to build.

Construction was timely. Shortly before completion, a flood swept away the nearby old bridge. The new one suffered no damage. Just

before the old bridge was lost, the withered old man known as "the Cricket," who kept it more or less in a state of repair, fell to his death. The new bridge, like the old, was named the "Bridge of the Cricket."

The project, though only a minor one, received much favorable publicity. The Afghans were looking forward with confidence and enthusiasm to building more bridges.

Karl C. Dod

Source: Major Phillip D. Weinert, "Suspension Bridges in Afghanistan," *The Military Engineer*, 59 (1967), 108 - 109.